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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 003839

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [EG](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [EUN](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT BELIEVES IT CAN MANAGE SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN  
A CAIRO PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETING

REF: STATE 92750 (NOTAL)

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: During a May 19 meeting with MFA Chief of Cabinet Sameh Shukry, the Charge delivered reftel demarche on USG objections to Syria's inclusion in the Iraq Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting planned for June 1-2 in Cairo. Shukry replied that excluding Syria would be diplomatically awkward for Egypt, and noted that the GOE believed from recent conference calls that invitations would be extended to the "Sharm Group, plus." Egypt could easily manage and contain any Syrian obstructionism, he asserted. On refining and defining the invite list, Shukry suggested that the entire Neighbors Group be represented by Turkey alone, should the larger "Sharm Group" be determined to be unworkable. Arguing further for the wider "Sharm Group" invite list, Shukri said that President Mubarak would be unlikely to turn down a direct appeal for inclusion from any of his regional counterparts, including Syrian President Asad. Shukry looked for specific proposals from the U.S. side on which to base the exclusion of Syria, but cautioned that Cairo would still likely support a wider list, including Syria. Shukry then made a strong appeal to exclude NATO from the PrepCom meeting, arguing that its attendance would draw criticism from within Egypt and the region. End summary.

2. (C) The Charge met May 19 with MFA Chief of Cabinet Sameh Shukry to convey our strong objections to including Syria among the invitees to the June 1-2 PrepCom meetings to be held in Cairo. Noting that the USG's "last-minute and unexpected" opposition to Syrian inclusion in the PrepCom put Cairo in an awkward position, Shukry said he wanted to find a constructive way to solve the issue. Egypt had no strong desire to include Syria, he said, but felt the Syrians could be "managed" and "contained" during the Prepcom meetings. It was also his understanding, he said, that the Syrians were anxious to display a cooperative attitude in this process. Egypt was approaching the participation issue from a practical standpoint, he argued, and was not interested in sending Syria a "political message" by pointedly excluding them, as he believed Washington wanted to do.

3. (C) Shukry offered as one plausible alternative having Turkey represent the Neighbors Group. Nonetheless, Shukry said if any of the regional heads of state (using Crown Prince Abdullah and President Asad as examples) were to call President Mubarak directly to request their country's participation, Mubarak would be hard-pressed to refuse the request. The GOE wants to protect itself within the Iraq Neighbors Group, and not be seen as the party "driving the first nail into the coffin" of this useful, productive regional grouping. Noting that Jordan had also not been included in the proposed PrepCom list, Shukry questioned why certain countries were included while other countries were excluded.

4. (C) Shukry also raised Egypt's discomfort with participation by NATO in the PrepCom. Arguing that Egypt was focused on supporting the political process in Iraq, rather than the military components, Shukry argued that NATO's presence would serve as a source of criticism from local and regional sources. Their participation in Brussels, he added, was fine. The Charge pushed back firmly, noting the expected security break-out sessions on the agendas of both the PrepCom and the Brussels conference, the relevance of NATO participation due to its active training role in Iraq, and Baghdad's interest in its inclusion.

5. (C) Earlier on May 19, poloff delivered reftel demarche to MFA Cabinet staff member Alaa Hadidi, arguing strongly against the inclusion of Syria in the June 1-2 PrepCom. Hadidi expressed frustration with the demarche, citing his government's understanding from earlier "small group" conference calls that PrepCom participation would be based on the "Sharm, plus" formula. In other words, PrepCom invitees would include all those who attended the Sharm Iraq Conference in November, plus a handful of additional states or organizations. Now, Hadidi exclaimed, "you want Sharm minus, plus." Hadidi said that apart from the conference call and an e-mail from Iraqi "small group" representative Hamoud, the Iraqis were not in direct touch with the Egyptians about the PrepCom. Nor had they expressed their specific objections to Syrian attendance. If Iraq had concerns with how the PrepCom was shaping up, Hadidi said, it

would be much better if those concerns were voiced by the Iraqis, instead of by the U.S. Embassy.

16. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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GRAY